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Maggie Steed's Story

Betty Dobson

The Hotel Metropolitan stands proudly at 724 Oscar Cross Ave. in Paducah, KY. This regal old building was built 100 years ago in 1909 by Mrs. Maggie Steed. But, who is this Maggie Steed? Little is known about her. If not for the hotel, we wouldn't have known that Maggie had existed. There are no known pictures of Maggie, but there are many stories about her. I will try to share, as best I can the things that I have learned about this amazing woman named Mrs. Maggie Steed.

Maggie was a great woman of her times. She was a Christian, mother, landowner, businesswoman and an advocate for social change. It's unbelievable the accomplishments that Maggie was able to achieve in a time when women had no rights. Oh, did I mention that Maggie was an African-American woman? "Colored" would have been the politically correct way to refer to her race during those days. With so many obstacles to overcome Maggie still excelled. She was born Maggie Wright in the state of Tennessee on August 20, 1877. Shortly after moving to Paducah, Maggie married Henry Steed in 1903. The couple was known for providing lodging to Colored travelers passing through the city. When Henry passed away, Maggie decided to open a modern hotel. So, she approach Langford and Orr, the city's largest lumber company and A. L. Lasiter, architect to build and design the hotel on her property at 724 Jackson Street, now Oscar Cross Ave. A deal was arranged for "one dollar" plus 62

notes for the sum of \$25.00 each with interest. Her investment apparently paid off, she was able to retire the debt in less than 6 years.

With no pictures of Maggie to look at, the U.S. Census became the tool to obtain a glimpse into her life. Using the 1900, 1910 and 1920 census, we learned that Maggie lived in Indiana and was listed as a widow with the last name of Mack. She had also married 2 more times after the death of husband Henry Steed. The 1910 census showed Maggie married to John Buford and that she could read and write. It also reported that Maggie was a *Mulatto*. *Mulatto is a term that was used to describe someone in an ethnic group who has both Black and White parents.* The census listed the people who were staying at the hotel. Also listed were four borders, two of which were under takers and two as labors. In 1917 Maggie Buford married Charles White. In the 1920 U. S. census, it reported Charles Buford (43) as the head of household, Maggie (41) as the wife, and Elizabeth Buford (8) as daughter. I notice that in small letter the word "adopt" was written over Elizabeth's name. Also listed was a nephew, Egna Thomas (19), *(not sure who's nephew)* as a laborer steam railroad, four roomers and one boarder. Their trades were listed as housemaid, cook, laborer at the rock quarry, a pastor at Barbershop and a nurse for private family. The going rate for lodging in those was about \$2.00 a night.

In 1912 the Golden Jubilee of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky stayed at the Hotel Metropolitan. They were here in

Paducah for a convention at Washington Street Baptist Church, at its same location on Washington Street. The association published a book called "The Golden Jubilee, of the General Association of Colored Baptists, The story of 50 Year's Work From 1865-1915", it was filled with pictures of Colored churches, their members and outstanding citizens of the various communities. In fact, the book displayed a picture of Paducah native Stewart Nelson and listed his accomplishments. Unfortunately, there wasn't a picture of Maggie in the book but, there was a picture of the Hotel Metropolitan, with a paragraph about Maggie and the hotel. It stated: *"Mrs. Maggie M. Steed was born in the state of Tennessee, in the year of 1877. She came to Paducah, KY., in the year of 1893. Being economical and having a business mind she saw the need of a modern hotel in the city to accommodate her people. She is now owner and operator of the Hotel Metropolitan. It is the leading colored hotel of the city, and doing a prosperous business. 724 Jackson St. Paducah, KY."*

During Maggie's ownership of the hotel, it was very clear that the Hotel Metropolitan was the *respectable place to stay* for colored travelers. In fact, Maggie was doing such a good business that she was preparing to add a third floor to the hotel. Sadly, on May 29, 1925 at 2:45a.m Maggie White passed away. She was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery. Her will listed two heirs, Edward Wright, son and Elizabeth Buford, daughter. Maggie left the hotel and the property in Texas to Edward and lot of land located at South 8th Street to Elizabeth. Though Maggie had divorced Charles White, she left him

fifty dollars in her will for his kindness towards her during her illness.

I don't know if Maggie knew that she was providing such a valuable service to so many soon to-be legendary figures. Though there are no pictures of Maggie to look at, her spirit is still felt at the Hotel Metropolitan. I hope that the information that I have shared with you will help you better understand the strength, courage and enduring spirit of Mrs. Maggie Steed/White.

Betty Dobson can literally bring Maggie Steed to life as she has spoken in that role to the JPHS (for the Spring 2009 meeting). Dobson has been instrumental in preserving the Hotel Metropolitan and Maggie's legacy.